

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BELIZE 00731 052131Z

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMCONSUL BELIZE

TO AMEMBASSY LONDON NIACT IMMEDIATE

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AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA NIACT IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BELIZE 0731

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR PFOR PINR BH GT UK

SUBJECT: BELIZE DISPUTE: REINFORCEMENT OF BRITISH GARRISON

REF: GUATEMALA 6130

1. SUMMARY. GOVERNOR POSNETT INFORMED CONGEN NOVEMBER 4 THAT HE HAD RELUCTANTLY REQUESTED REINFORCEMENTS TO THE BRITISH GARRISON IN RESPONSE TO GUATEMALAN MOVEMENT OF APC'S AND OTHER VEHICLES INTO POPTUN OCTOBER 31 WHICH, HE SAID, GAVE THEM THE ABILITY TO ATTACK BELIZE WITH LITTLE OR NO WARNING. REINFORCEMENTS OF 500 TROOPS AND 6 HARRIER AIRCRAFT ARE EXPECTED TO BEGIN ARRIVING AT BELIZE AIRPORT NOVEMBER 5 AND A FRIGATE IS TO ARRIVE AT PUNTA GORDA. A LOW KEY PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REINFORCEMENTS AND THE PRECEDING GUATEMALAN MOVEMENT OF APC'S IS TO BE MADE JUST PRIOR TO THE ARRIVAL. END SUMMARY.

2. GOVERNOR POSNETT CALLED ME IN ON NOV 4 FOR A BRIEFING ON HIS DECISION TO REQUEST REINFORCEMENTS FOR THE BRITISH GARRISON. HE SAID THE GUATEMALANS HAD SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED THEIR MILITARY CAPABILITY AGAINST BELIZE BY MOVING ALL TEN OF THEIR ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS (APC'S), 16 OTHER HEAVY VEHICLES, AND A NUMBER OF JEEPS TO POPTUN. HE SAID THE VEHICLES WERE SEEN AND COUNTED ON THE ROAD TO POPTUN BY TWO BRITISH ARMY OBSERVERS AT CADENAS ON THE AFTERNOON OF OCTOBER 31. THE GOVERNOR SAID THAT

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BATTALLION OF TROOPS WAS STATIONED AT POPTUN WITH ANOTHER 400-450

IN THE MELCHOR-POLVERA AREA, THE LATTER NUMBER GIVEN BY GUATEMALAN POLICE TO BELIZE POLICE COMMISSIONER WILLOUGHBY DURING A RECENT VISIT TO FLORES ON POLICE MATTERS. IN ADDITION, THE GUATEMALANS HAD STATIONED 12 OF THEIR 14 COASTAL PATROL BOATS IN PUERTO SANTO TOMAS WHERE THEY COULD EASILY CARRY 20 MEN APIECE ACROSS THE FEW MILES OF WATER TO PUNTA GORDA.

3. THE GOVERNOR INDICATED THAT PART OF HIS ABILITY TO DEFEND BELIZE WITH FEW TROOPS DEPENDED ON THE EARLY WARNING INHERENT IN GUATEMALAN MOVEMENT OF VEHICLES AND TROOPS TOWARD THE BORDER AREA. THIS, HE SAID, HAD HAPPENED ON OCTOBER 31 AND THE GUATEMALANS WERE NOW CAPABLE OF MOVING INTO SOUTHERN BELIZE OVERNIGHT WITHOUT WARNING. HE SAID THAT 5 OF THE 10 LOW-LOADERS USED TO BRING UP THE APC'S WERE STILL IN POPTUN, GIVING THE GUATEMALANS THE CAPABILITY TO MOVE THE APC'S QUICKLY TO OTHER POINTS SUCH AS MELCHOR. THE GOVERNOR SAID HE EXPLORED ALL POSSIBLE MEANS OF DEFENDING BELIZE IN VIEW OF THE INCREASED GUATEMALAN CAPABILITIES, AND SAW NO CHOICE BUT TO ASK FOR REINFORCEMENTS. HE SAID HE MADE HIS DECISION RELUCTANTLY, AWARE THAT IT COULD LEAD TO A "POINTLESS ARMS RACE." HE ALSO SAID THAT HE SAW LITTLE UTILITY IN COMPLAINING TO GUATEMALAN CONSUL GENERAL CASTELLANOS WHO HAD RECENTLY ASSURED HIM THAT ONLY 80-90 TROOPS WERE IN THE MELCHOR-POLVERA AREA AND WHO MIGHT IN FACT NOT BE AWARE OF THE ACTUAL PLACEMENT OF GUATEMALAN TROOPS AND VEHICLES.

4. GOVERNOR POSNETT SAID HE EXPECTED THE REINFORCEMENT TROOPS AND PLANES TO BEGIN ARRIVING NO SOONER THAN 5PM LOCAL TIME, NOVEMBER 5. AN ESTIMATED 18-20 PLANE LOADS SPREAD OVER SEVERAL DAYS WOULD BE REQUIRED TO DELIVER THE 500 TROOPS AND 6 "HARRIER" ATTACK AIRCRAFT WHICH THE GOVERNOR SAID WOULD BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH THE APC'S. HE INDICATED THAT A FRIGATE WAS ON ITS WAY TO PUNTA GORDA TO DETER ANY ADVENTURE BY THE GUATEMALAN PATROL BOATS NEARBY. THE GOVERNOR SAID HE PLANNED TO ANNOUNCE THE REINFORCEMENTS AND THE CAUSE THEREOF (THE INCREASE IN GUATEMALAN CAPABILITIES) ABOUT AN HOUR BEFORE THEIR EXPECTED ARRIVAL. HE SAID THAT THE STATE DEPARTMENT SHOULD HAVE ALREADY BEEN INFORMED OF THE REINFORCEMENT DECISION AND TIMING AND THAT GOG AND THE GUATEMALAN CONSUL GENERAL IN BELIZE WOULD BE INFORMED AS CONFIDENTIAL

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SOON AS AUTHORIZATION HAD BEEN RECEIVED FROM LONDON.
PIERCE

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Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
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